

# Consumer Perceptions of Diverse Food Preferences: A Card-Sorting Exercise

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## Introduction



Discussions on diversity typically focus on issues surrounding ethnicity, race, or culture.



This project takes a unique perspective and examines perceptions of diverse preferences within food consumption.

### Purpose

This research will help us better understand contemporary perceptions about food preferences and marketplace categorizations.

### Research Question

How do consumer perceptions and categorizations of food options for meal selections converge and vary based on food preference or philosophy?

### Literature Review

- human beliefs and rituals delineate what counts as food, and . . . conversely humans use food in delineating what counts as ritual or proper belief (Mintz and DuBois 2003).
- food [should be viewed] not simply as a combination of nutrients, but as community, pleasure, comfort, and kinship (Block et al. 2014)
- food may both result in conflict and resolve it. . . food can reflect a lack of harmony based on varying tastes and preferences (Kniazeva and Venkatesh 2007)

## Methodology



Administer online consumer survey & card-sort exercise

45 Participants

Age 18 - 54

33 Food Choices



Participants were sent a link to the card-sort study and survey via email.



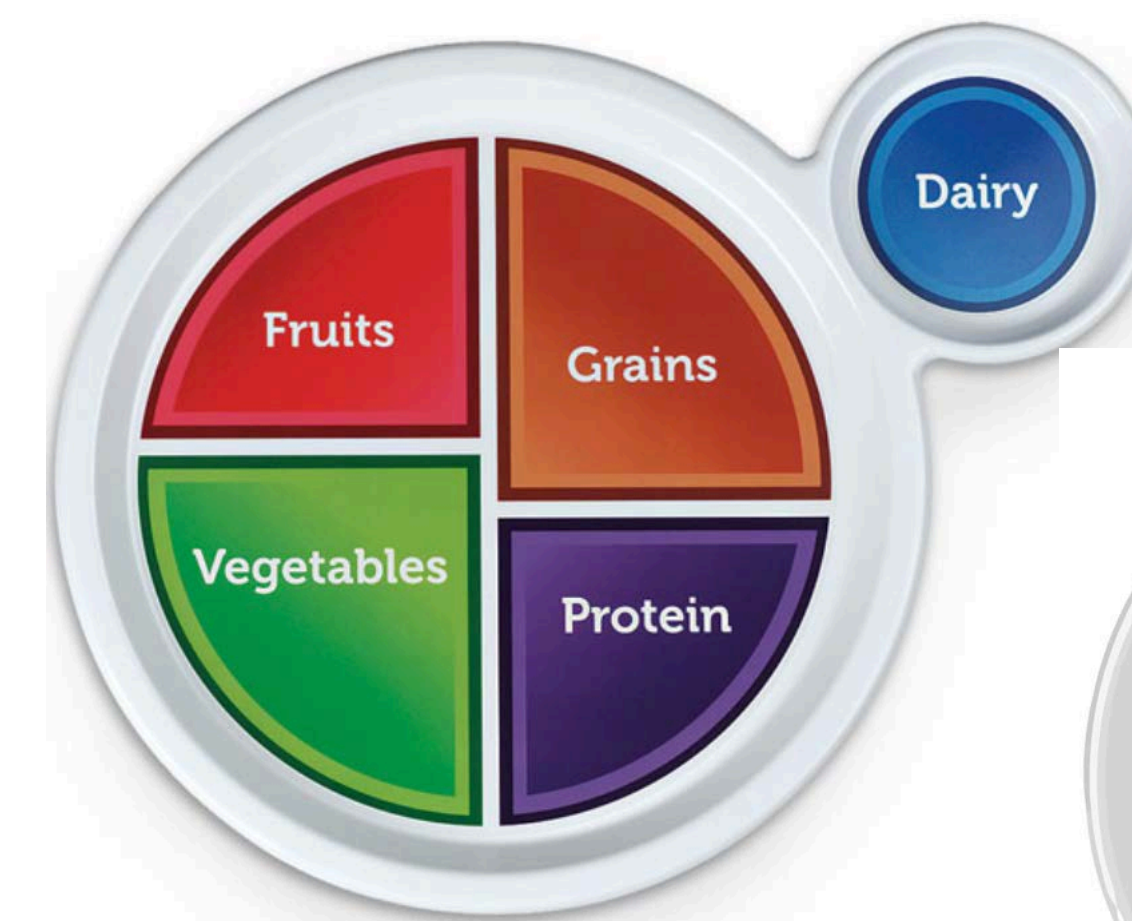
They were asked to create an ideal meal for breakfast, lunch and dinner for vegetarian, vegan, gluten-free, and omnivore food preferences.



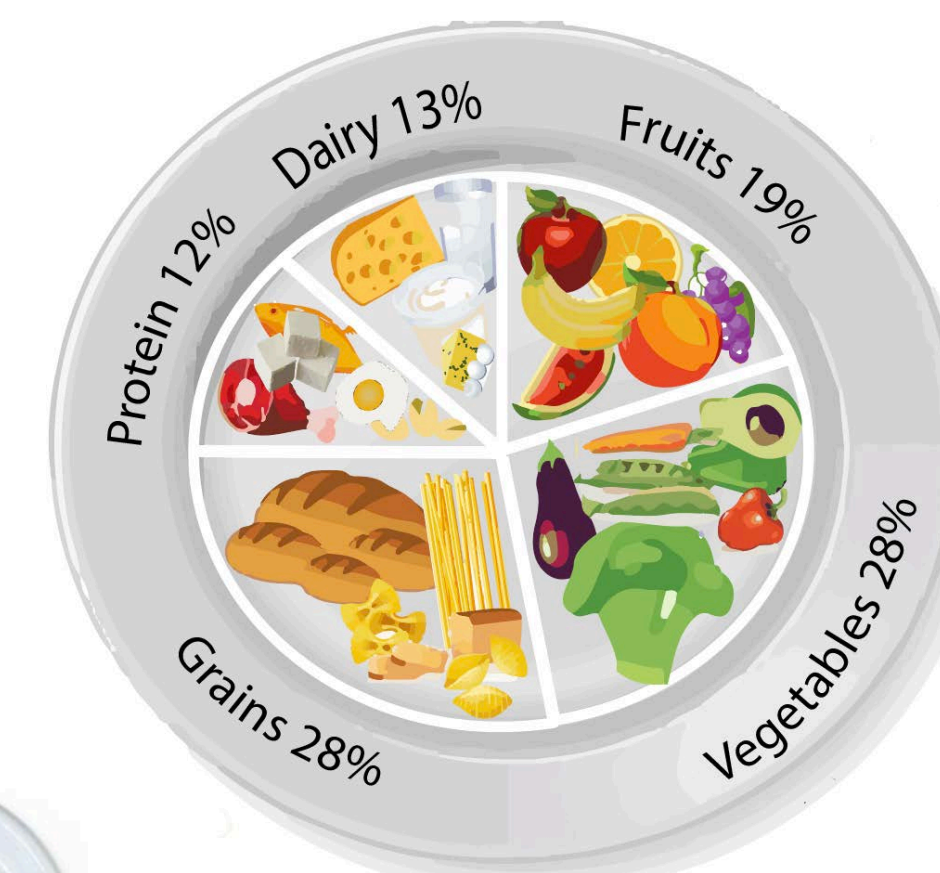
Participants chose from a list of foods from the following categories: vegetables, fruits, grains, protein and dairy.

## Early Results

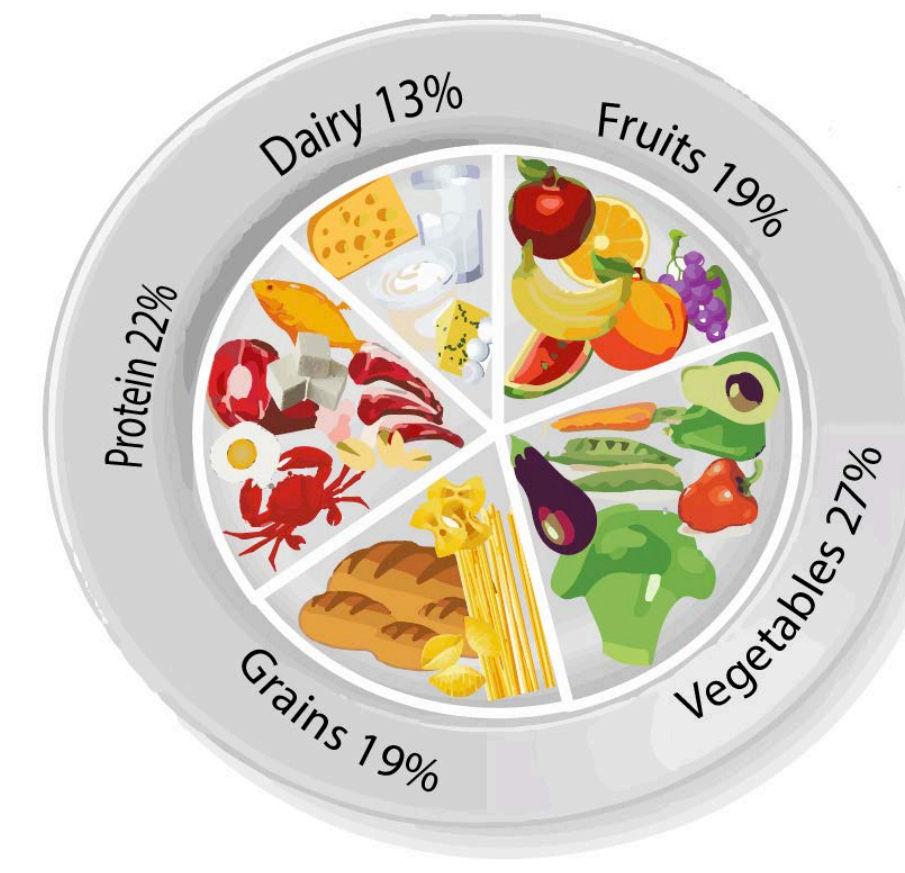
These food plates represent the percentages of all food choices made for breakfast, lunch and dinner for each category



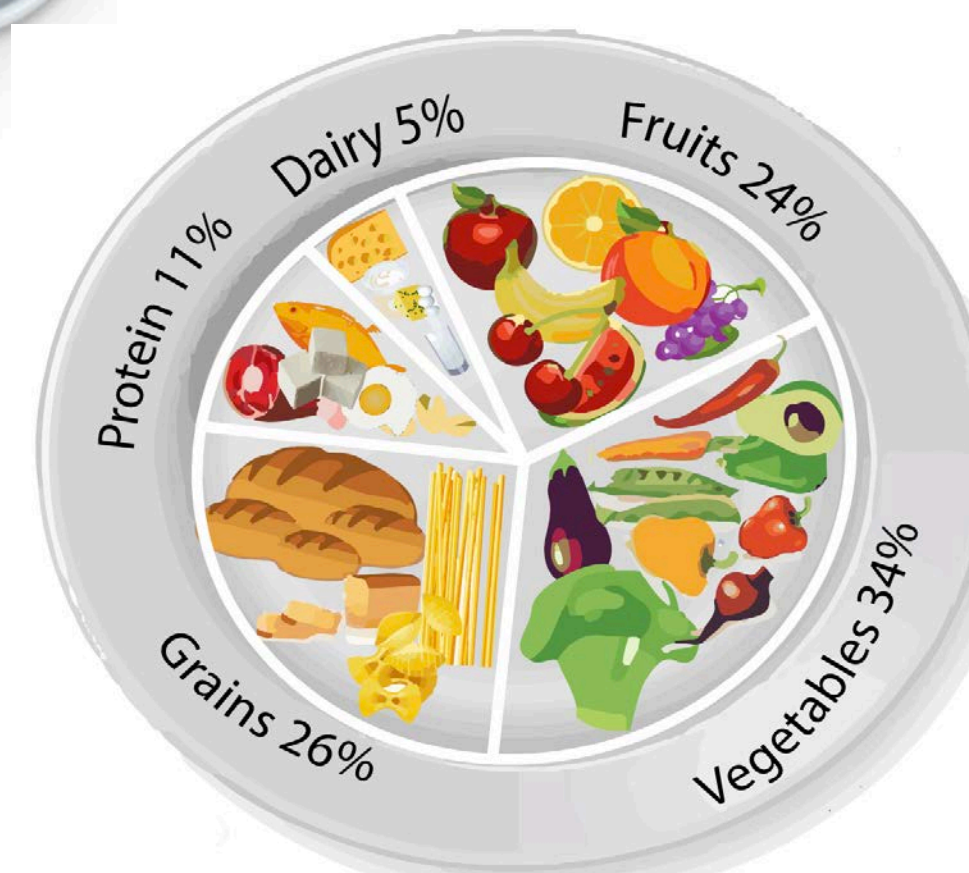
Vegetarian



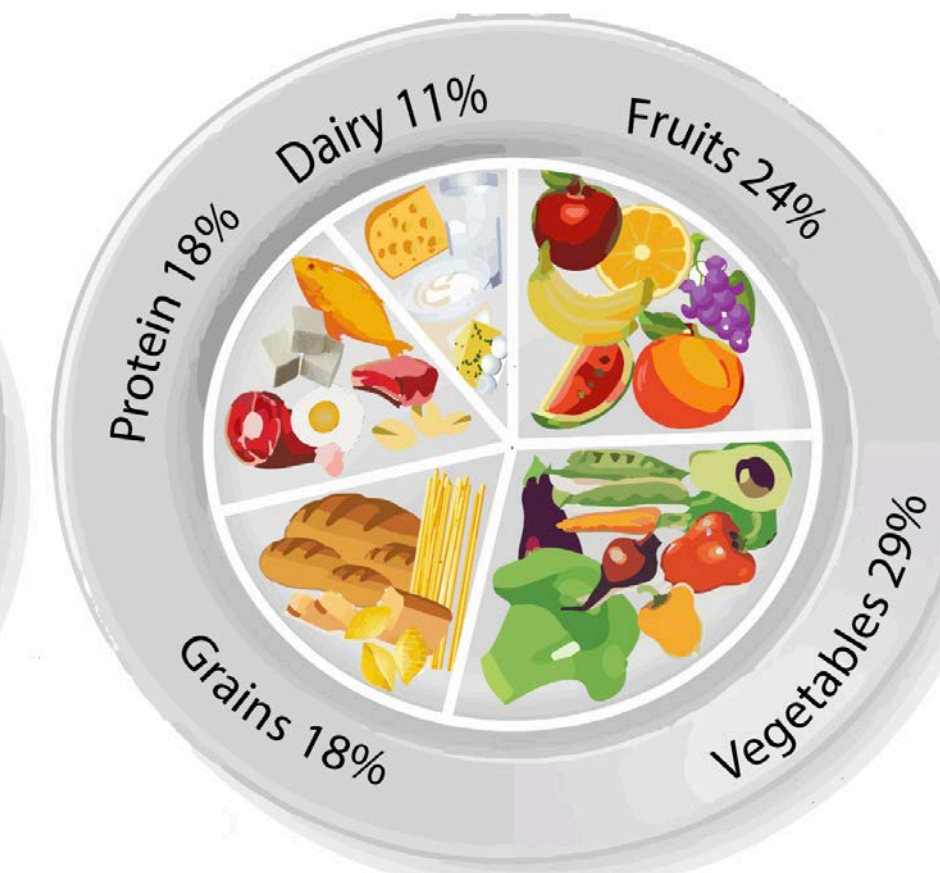
Omnivore



Vegan



Gluten-Free



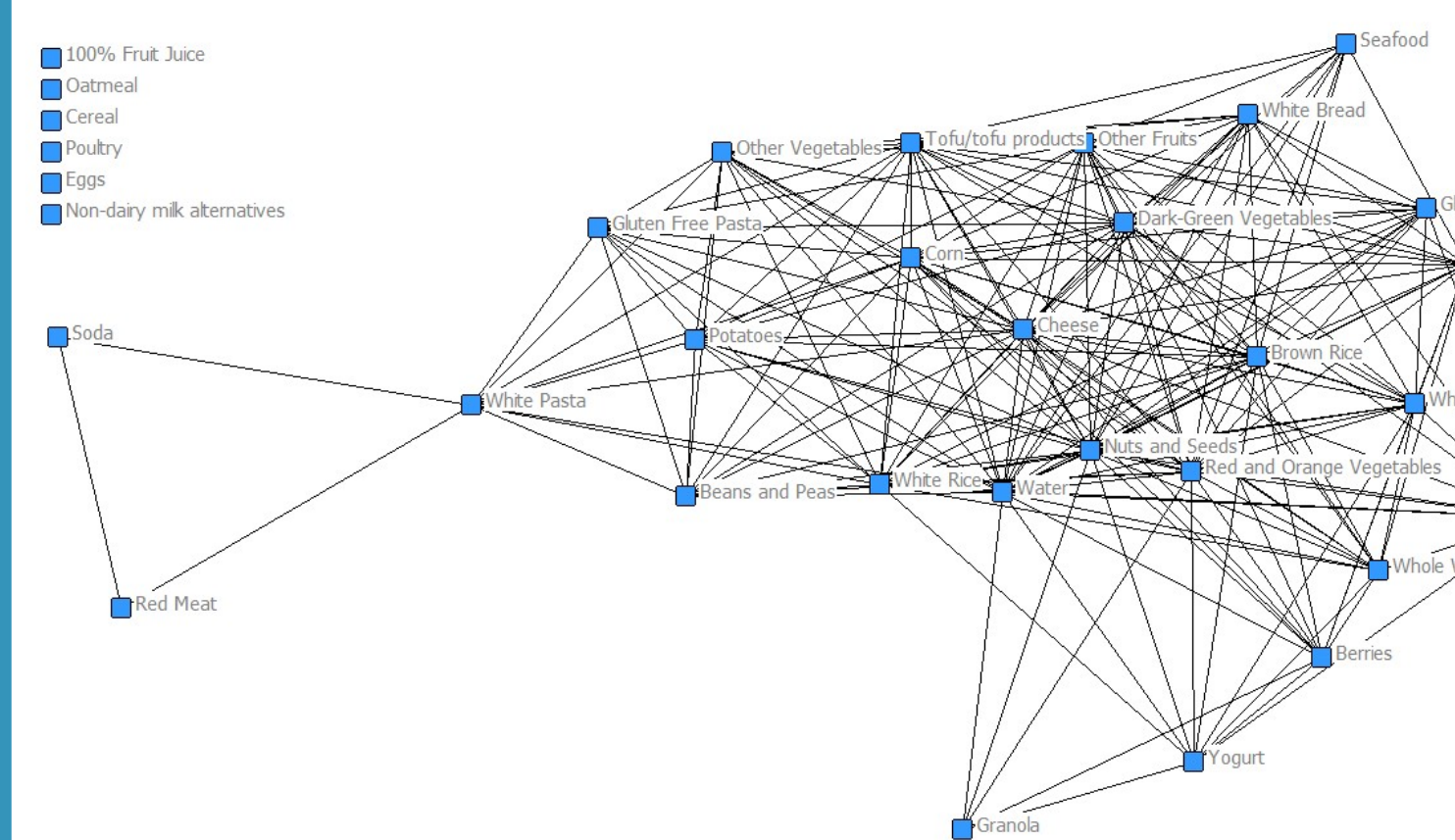
### Data Analysis

Social network analytic techniques to show the relationships between the different food items across the four categories of food consumption.

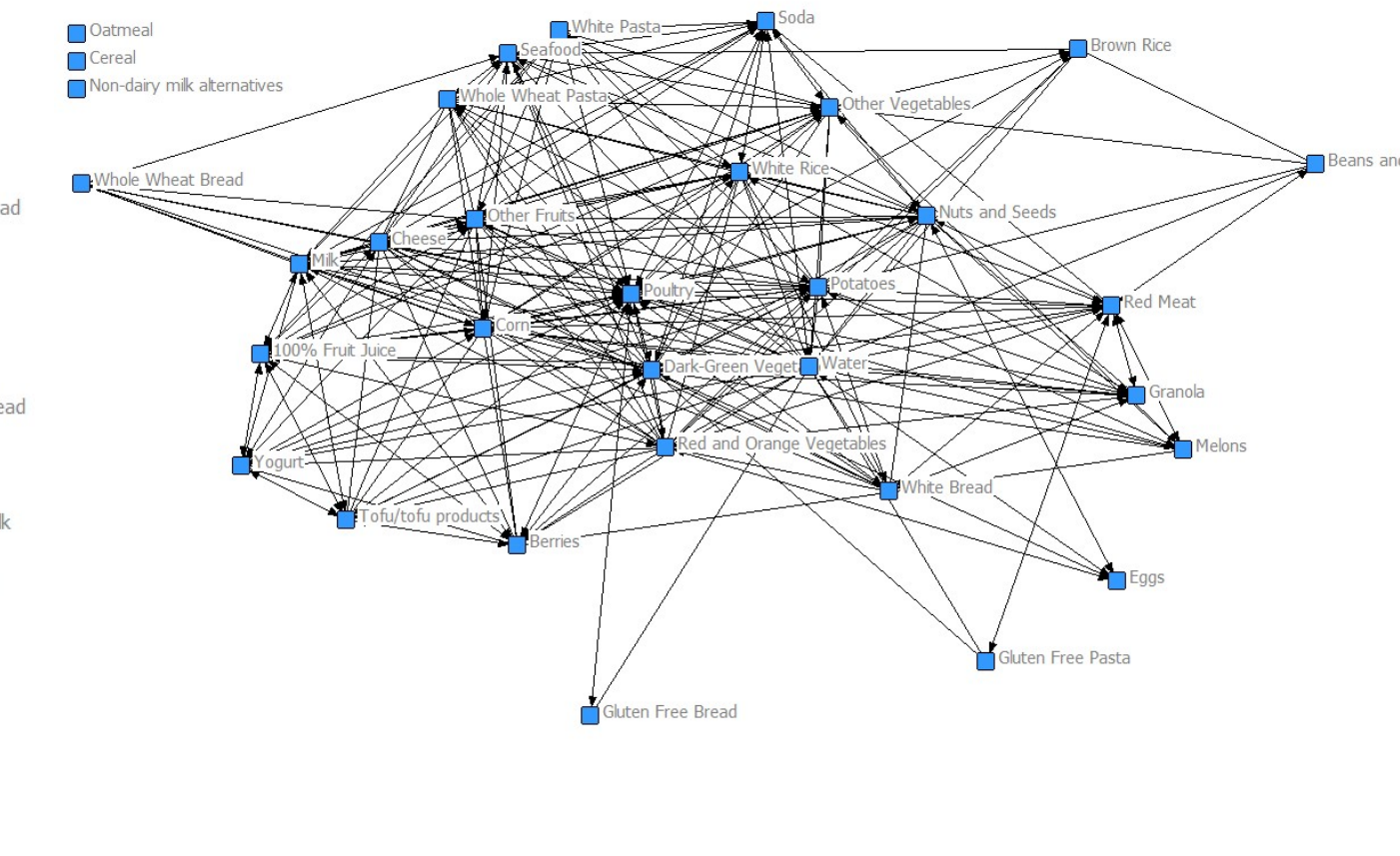
Data entered into UCInet and converted to a one-mode affiliation matrix, looking at the relationships between the food items based on the affiliations with different participants.

Netdraw, a visualization software program, was used to create the related sociograms and portray which food items were more or less central across participants.

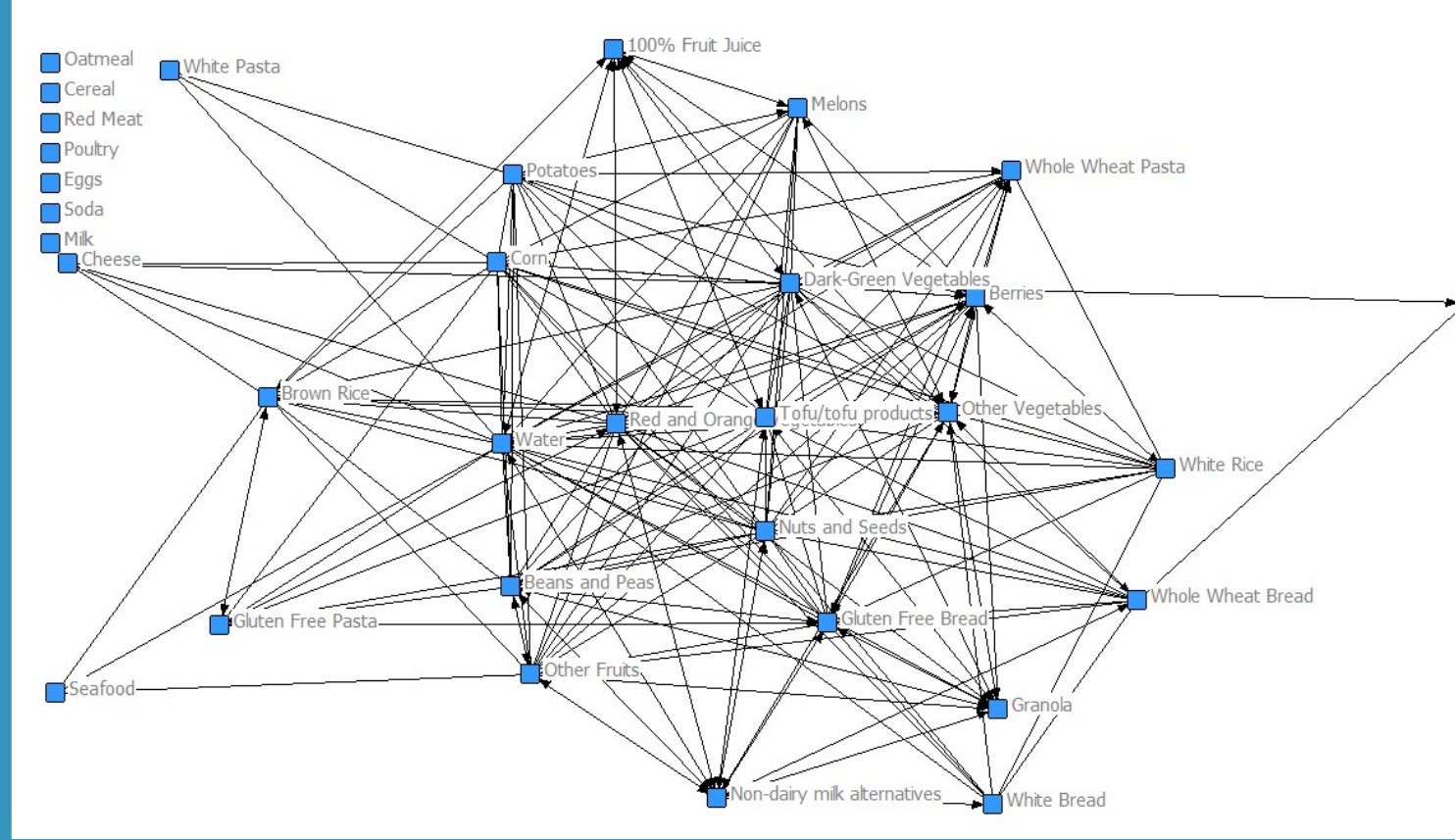
Vegetarian Lunch



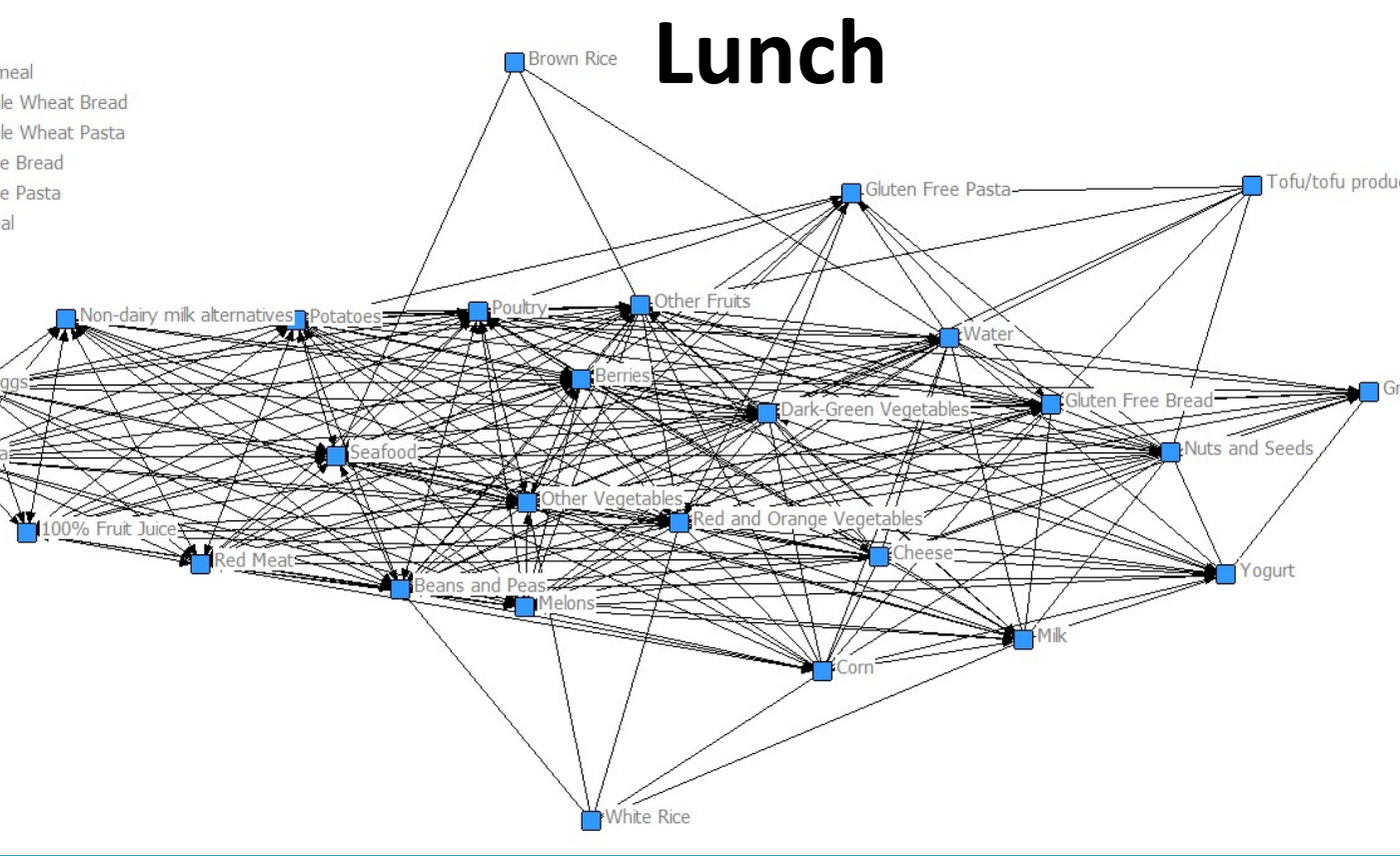
Omnivore Lunch



Vegan Lunch



Gluten-Free Lunch



## Preliminary Implications

Key motivations for particular eating habits: health, taste preferences, costs and social influence

91% of participants choose one of these motivations.

60% identify themselves by their eating habits.

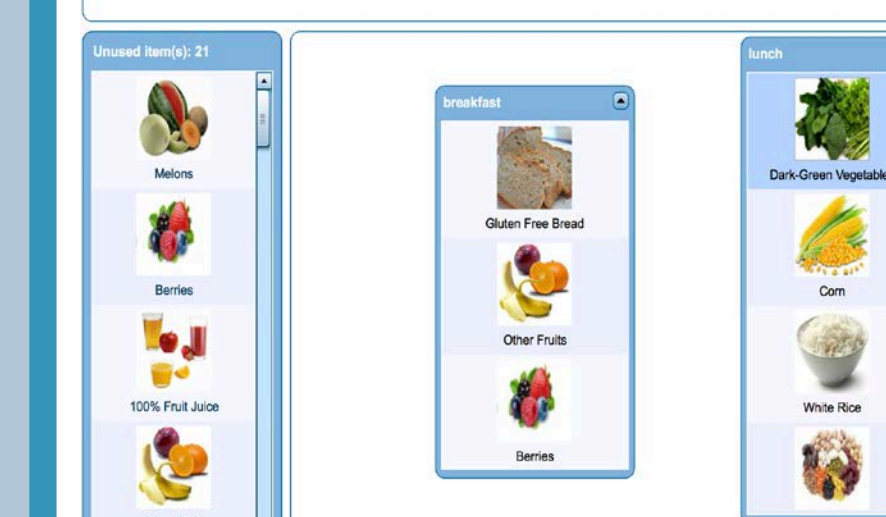
93% have family and friends with similar eating habits.

- Findings support social influences as a motivation. Also suggests that the identification with food is present, but less explicit.
- Meal component expectations are essentially the same. This supports the notion of an expected meal structure as part of the ritual, reinforced by cultural norms, wider society, marketers, retailers and policy makers.
- Lunch seems to be the most dense, perhaps indicating that this is the most versatile meal, with more fluid expectations versus breakfast which is the most defined, least flexible meal.
- Participants seem to see gluten-free items as not confined to those needing to consume gluten-free meals – an indication perhaps of the growing gluten-free trend, which has been of concern to physicians.

## Future Directions

This project is being completed in 2 phases

### VEGETARIAN



Phase 1 focuses on individual food preferences and perceptions. The findings and limitations revealed in this test study will be further analyzed and explored in Phase 2.

Phase 2 will use in-depth interviews to examine spouses and partnerships within the household, where one partner has firm or flexible preferences for particular types of foods, and the other partner does not share that food preference or philosophy.



## Acknowledgments



ChooseMyPlate.gov

Cardsorting.net

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